

October 9, 2017

Exhibit 6

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Water Policy Interim Committee  
65<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature

Dear Chairperson Connell and Committee Members:

We are a working group of the Clark Fork & Kootenai River Basins Council, and our focus is *Ensuring Natural System Health and Water Availability for Human Use*.

We hope to identify and promote policies and projects that will promote both of these critical needs in support of the Clark Fork & Kootenai River Basins Water Plan and the State of Montana Water Plan. Informed by the Montana State Water Plan and the recently released Montana Climate Assessment, we feel there is a critical need for identification and analysis of potential projects that can conserve or restore natural water storage infrastructure (wetlands, floodplains, etc.) as well as artificial storage projects that minimize negative environmental impacts (and may even have positive impacts).

Identifying and analyzing such potential projects requires a well-designed and adequately funded hydrologic monitoring system for stream flows, groundwater levels, and climate information. We are concerned about declining support for such monitoring, including insufficient funds to maintain DNRC streamflow monitoring sites and to partner with the USGS on its streamflow monitoring sites. In addition to supporting future project planning, this monitoring has been and will continue to be particularly important in informing local drought response coordination efforts such as in the Blackfoot basin and other portions of the Upper Clark Fork River basin.

We urge WPIC to make it a priority to explore ways to ensure that USGS stream gauges have full federal funding either to be operated by USGS or through appropriations to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. We also recommend that WPIC helps ensure that the necessary state support continues for streamflow monitoring (DNRC/USGS), groundwater monitoring (the MBMG's GWIC, GWAP, and GWIP programs), and climate studies designed to inform the analysis of potential storage projects.

In addition, adequate funding for DNRC to participate in collaborative planning with groups like the Clark Fork & Kootenai River Basins Council will ensure that this hydrologic monitoring data has maximum impact on citizen efforts to manage our limited water resources for the greatest benefit to all.

Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

Vicki Watson, spokesperson for *Ensuring Natural System Health and Water Availability for Human Use Working Group of Clark Fork & Kootenai River Basins Council*